Objects of Architecture

This thesis has been submitted to the faculty and staff of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Architecture

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Approved:
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would like to thank my family for their support; for his encouragement; the family for their help; and for their advice; for the use of his desk; and the Lord for giving me these talents and abilities.</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
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<td>Graduate Thesis Project</td>
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<td>Undergraduate Thesis Project</td>
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<td>Ring</td>
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<td>Bibliography</td>
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Abstract

"I believe it takes a long time to be an architect; it takes a long time to be the architect of one's aspirations. You can become an architect professionally overnight. But to feel the spirit of architecture from which one makes his offering takes much longer. And where does the architect sit? He sits right there; he is the one who conveys the beauty of spaces, which is the very means of architecture. Think of meaningful space and you invent an environment, and it can be your invention. Therein lies the architect."

-Louis Kahn

Architecture has meaning and purpose when it is seen not as something that firmly must exist, but as the possibilities that a situation creates. I have not yet found that which is concretely architecture, but I can say that which could exist as beauty in this world. The design of everyday objects becomes architecture to me, whether it be of a building, a piece of jewelry, or a piece of pottery.

My undergraduate thesis was a study of the interaction of a curved wall and a straight wall, as autonomous elements. I proposed not only the spacial design but also how it is effected and changed by the site; namely the repetition and orientation.

In my graduate work, I undertook an investigation of the connection between old and new. My thesis suggests, in the form of three schemes or plans, what that connection could be and how it creates and affects architecture.
Bed and Breakfast
Yarrow Road, Blacksburg, Virginia

A Bed and Breakfast allows visitors to participate in a way of life that once existed. It is not just lodging, but a refuge from commercial culture. In America, Bed and Breakfasts have become an alternative type of lodging, in contrast to their original purpose in Europe to provide lodging for travelers who could not afford hotels.

This thesis project makes three proposals how a Bed and Breakfast can be: an alternative to the hotel and a refuge from culture today.

Yarrow Road is on the outskirts of Blacksburg. Here, in 1986, Robert Martin purchased 70.1 acres of land and built a home for his wife and four children. Fifty yards from their new home stands the original farmhouse structure. It was begun in the 1850's as a two story, 15' X 15' log cabin. In the 1890's the rest of the house was constructed. The two sheds just behind the house had specific purposes; the one on the left was for food storage and the one on the right was built with a fireplace so the children could sleep here on cold winter nights. This house, it's construction, and it's I-style typology was - and still is - common in this area. The representation of this style and its historical popularity make it worthy of saving, restoring, and creating in it a place for visitors.
"I came to find rest. I came to see an old house, to live in it, to feel part of another decade. I left having experienced what a family once did, living here, except when I needed the conveniences of running water and a flush toilet. The machines of man hid in the shadows of the nineteenth century, existing only when I used them. Life here was peaceful. It was about nature and the land. I hated to leave."

-Anonymous, future guest.

Plan 1 is about minimal intervention. It is about the addition of a man made machine to a pre-industrial revolution building. The "machines" become the extention of the existing, in a minimal way. The passage from the 1890's to the 1990's happens in an instant, but even in the 1990's building, there is still a wall from the 1890's. The machines are just a careful addition, joining but not disturbing the existing building. The new construction of a framework with an infill is of an opposite mentality than the existing frame with a skin. With modern materials the new doesn't copy the old; they stand in a quiet contradiction.
"I came to get away from the world of hubbub that I love. I found 1890, framed by 1993. I lived in both worlds, which existed next to each other. 1993 stood tall and proud. 1890 stood as a reminder of what life used to be like before it was run over by the industrial revolution, increased city life and bad architecture. Staying here was a constant reminder of what was and what is. I enjoyed my stay but I was anxious to once again fully surround myself with 1993."

Anonymous, future guest.

Plan 2 is about a dominating intervention. The machines of man become the frame of the existing and the primary element. The addition is separate from the existing house. When you occupy the new space, you are surrounded by the new. The threshold from old to new is two walls thick.

The philosophy of construction here is similar to that of Plan 1. The frame exists for an infill, as opposed to a skin. The materials of steel columns, glass block and metal panels speak of modernness and stand in stark contrast to the undisturbed farmhouse.
"I spent a weekend here, picking my lunch from the garden and fresh spices for my dinner from the yard. I enjoyed the view. I enjoyed living like it was 100 years ago. I enjoyed using a modern bathroom. I saw modern placed in a line across the site, separate and detached from the rest of the structure. The modern became part of the pieces of the farm, but yet it stayed it's separate self. I enjoyed meeting other guests in the parlor. I enjoyed being alone in my room, in front of a glass framed window."

-Anonymous, future guest.

Plan 3 is about separation, connection and site. The new machines become separate buildings themselves, on a site with many sheds that exist in plan as one entity. The glass connection between the house and the machines is like stepping outside before entering the addition. Glass boxes frame the original openings and replace the old windows. The guest experiences the entire site. The yard and the path through it create a haven; a garden.

The stud wall construction compliments the existing, but is still, in it's proportions, obviously new.
Detail: Plan 3
(above) These sections show how the space between the house and the machines becomes a hall of glass; it's almost as if you have to go out to go in.

Detail: Plan 2
(below) The elevation shows the domination of the addition while the sections show the distinct walls of old and new.
Site: Plan 1  The guest knocks on the Martin's door. Kay takes the guest to his room. The Martin's house disappears behind the trees.

Site: Plan 2  The guest parks. The guest walks down a long path. He follows the path through the guest house.

Site: Plan 3  The guest parks. He walks down a long path. He follows it to the garden, or is this still the path?
"The owner will be your host. Patrons must leave city habits at home. Stories about the resident ghost and other famous guests will be told upon request. Menu fare will change with the season to insure use of fresh ingredients. Large helpings must be served to all diners; bread and muffins will be fresh from the oven. Guests should warm themselves by the fire. A historic and personal atmosphere must be preserved."

-Taken from "Rules of the Tavern," in Bed and Breakfast American Style

In conclusion, I propose that the answer is not found in Plan 1, 2 or 3, but in the study of all three. Together, the ideas and individual findings could create a whole. The most important findings are the interaction of site, the distinction of old and new, and how to restore but not "remake" the existing. The site succeeds when it becomes part of the experience of the guest, be it through the designing of a garden or the planting of a tree. Careful detailing to create a differentiation between the old and the new is also important to the whole. This may be done by the separation of these parts, or by the use of materials. For me, the most important finding has been the need to restore the old without just replacing it. Careful attention to the fact that today things aren't built the same way creates opportunities to build *around* the existing and to beautify *that*, such as in the framing of the window openings with a glass box, purely showing where the old window once existed.
Place for Meditation
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia

Nature is peaceful. It gives us a feeling of closeness with God. Pure, pristine architecture has the same effect, especially when in harmony with that nature.

The University Chapel is a worship space for many. This project for a Place of Meditation provides a worship space designed for one. The student is one in a crowd of 22,000 on the University's campus. This is a place in which to forget the 21,999 and to think of One.

The curved walls are poured in place concrete - for light.
The straight walls are concrete masonry units - for structure.
The bench is sheet metal bolted to the block - for awareness.
The roof is corrugated aluminum - for shelter, for sound.
Concrete walls block out the world and between them only light is allowed to enter as a rememberance of what was left beyond those walls. At night, the memory of this light is recreated inside the walls artificially; therefore giving back to the world the beauty of light.
The proposed site for this project was originally near the duck pond. The two primary reasons for this site choice were the serenity of the location and the possibility of enhancing the axis from the Mall through the Chapel, across the Drillfield, and then along the stream running to the duck pond.

Upon further study, two major disadvantages became evident. Due to the secluded and wooded location, the site is a potentially unsafe place at night. Also, this remote area of campus already provides an atmosphere conducive to the separation of oneself from worldly commotion.

The most important quality of the building is its ability to block out the surrounding world, even if that world is just beyond its walls. The heart of campus and its "activity areas" now becomes an exciting place to propose this building.

Each site requires small adjustments in the architecture to suit its needs: a change in the rotation of the curved wall to accommodate the sun's position, a change in the number of units because of the size of the site, or a change in the elevation because of the slope of the site.

Three units would be built on Cowgill Plaza. The kiosk between Newman Library and Squires Student Center would be replaced with one unit. The far end of Prichard Prairie near the War Memorial Gymnasium would hold a long string of units, and in front of McBride Hall, four units would be nestled into the hill.
Wedding Rings

Given the three diamonds, the engagement ring setting was designed to seemingly suspend the stones between two bands of 18K gold. The wedding band, whose form is half of the matching ring, completes the set. The ring was cast by Capones Jewelry in Blacksburg, Virginia.
This design was the result of an exploration of cup, handle and saucer. The proportions came from simple geometry. The handle became a study of how the cup would be held and used. The saucer became not a place for spills but a base or "ending" for the cup. The cup was cast in porcelain in a two part mold and the handle was made by slab construction. The saucer was cast in a one part mold.
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